**New Trends in Management**

**Flexible working**

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**Introduction**

In this wiki I will investigate how flexible working is a new trend in management. But to start off with, to first investigate it we have to understand what it is. A definition provided by gov.uk defines flexible working as ‘Flexible working is a way of working that suits an employee’s needs, eg having flexible start and finish times, or working from home’. I will also look at each different word in the phrase ‘new trend in management and define them to show how flexible working is indeed a new trend in management. I will also identify and investigate the benefits and drawbacks of flexible working for the employee and the employer, as well as work life balance. In addition to this I will also look at how flexible working slowly became part of the modern way of working and how it can benefit employees and business in the both the short term and the long term, to prove that flexible working is a new trend in management.

**What is Flexible Working?**

Flexible working is a way of working that suits the employee’s needs, but in order to apply for flexible working an employee needs to have worked for the same employer for 26 weeks or more. The employer will also need to approve an application form that the employee submits saying that they want to work flexibly. There are multiple ways an employee can flexibly work, such as:

**Job sharing** - Two or more people do one job and split the hours

**Working from home** - Where the employee can do the work they usually do in the office at home without it being too much trouble

**Part time** - working only a couple of days a week

**Compressed hours** - full time hours, working fewer days

**Flexitime** - employees are allowed to work when they want (employer has to agree with these times), but they still have to work ‘core hours’

**Staggered hours** - employees start and finish time are different to other employees

**Annualised hours** - employees have to work a few core hours but the rest of the time they can choose when they work

**Phased retirement** - instead of just retiring the employee can choose to work less hours

Depending on the job and the market that the employee works in, a different way of flexible working may be more appropriate than another. This will mean that management will have to choose carefully what sort of flexible working they allow an employee to have, if any.

**Definition of a new trend in management?**

By looking into what each word means I can show how flexible working is a new trend in management. It will be easier for me to show how flexible working meets the criteria of a new trend in management by using the definitions as the criteria. I will be using the Oxford Dictionary for all definitions as they are a highly reliable source when looking for definitions. How can you determine if something is new, the Oxford Dictionary defines the term new as ‘Produced, introduced, or discovered recently or now for the first time; not existing before’. The next word to define is ‘trend’, according to the Oxford Dictionary a trend is ‘A general direction in which something is developing or changing’. The last word to define is ‘management’ and according to the Oxford Dictionary the term management is ‘The process of dealing with or controlling things or people’.

**History of Flexible Working**

Flexible working first started becoming a popular concept for employees in the last two decades (It became more important within the Employment Act, 2002), which is a result of all the advances within technology in this growing digital world. This is because there are now lots of different ways employees can work outside the office. Giving them more freedom and choice for when they want to work and what work they want to do. In 2014 the government decided to let all employees become eligible for flexible working, as prior to that it was only available to carers and people who had to look after children. Even though all employees are eligible employers have to deal with all the applications seriously, with not many being successful. Since this a more recent concept, I would say that this is new, as it hasn’t been around for that long. Even though it has been around for at least the last 20 years, I would say that it has gained popularity in the last 10 years, due to the advances of technology such as google docs and other pieces of software that make it easier for people to work together. This also fits with the definition from the Oxford Dictionary, as flexible working has been discovered recently and therefore should be considered as new.

**Benefits of Flexible Working**

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWTBCsLmsOg)The benefits of being able to flexibly work is that you can fit the work you need to do around your personal life, so that you  can fit in all the different activities you  want to do (or need to) in your daily life without work getting in the way. By having the availability to have this flexible time of work, it cuts out unnecessary stresses in life such as travelling to work when it's rush hour. Instead employees could travel to work a couple of hours later in order to relax and enjoy the journey into work as much as possible. Research has suggested that stress has a negative impact on an employee's work ethic and could lead them to become less productive (Karen Higginbottom, 2014). Therefore management would have to carefully monitor the stress levels in order to keep productivity high and to help improve the business. This is why I would state that flexible working is a form of management, as well as fitting in with the definition from the Oxford Dictionary, as managers need to make sure that they let the right employees and the right amount of employees have flexible work, so that you do not create too much stress in the workplace, as too many people working in one area can become too busy and everyone will be rushing to untaken an activity first, such as photocopying. Making less employees work in the office, without firing anyone will create less stress as employees feel they have more time to do their job, as well as more peace and less noise making a more relaxing office atmosphere. This is because there may not be enough space for everyone to work and therefore have to find a solution, in which they will end up dealing with the issue and therefore I believe that this is a form of management.

By having this freedom, flexible working is a favourite management techniques for employees, as like stated previously it gives them the opportunity to do their work when it suits them. If it creates a more productive workforce, then it will also be a favourite amongst employers. As employers want to make sure that they have a happy and productive workforce so employees do not waste their time at work and by keeping employees happy it will help to reduce expenditures. This is due to the fact that there will be a lower staff turnover and so the business spends less on training and can invest the extra finance somewhere else in the business if they want, which will help them become more competitive. Employees also prefer having the ability to work flexibly over financial bonuses, which also affects the satisfaction of employees in the workplace. This ultimately leads to management as management has to be made aware of what motivates their employees the best so that they can motivate their employees in the best way possible instead of wasting money on motivational methods that do not work. As a result of how popular flexible working is within the workforce 97% of businesses, as of 2013 (The Fourth Work-Life Balance Employer Survey, 2013) have now implemented at least one form of flexible working to try and improve employee satisfaction. Therefore I completely agree that flexible working is a management strategy, as it helps keeps the employees motivated which is the sign of a good management strategy. I would also like to argue that this is a trend, as for a concept to only start appearing in the early 2000’s and become so popular that 97% of businesses feel like they have to at least include one form of flexible working, I would say that it is so widely used that it has to be considered a trend, but a new one, as like I stated earlier, it has only been around since the early 2000’s. This again matches the definition of a trend provided by the Oxford Dictionary, as flexible working has offered a new direction in the way employees can work and it has been able to stay around for a long time. Which will eliminate the possibility of flexible working being a fad and therefore flexible working is a trend.

**Drawbacks of Flexible Working**

Even though that I think flexible working is a very good concept and using it within businesses is very beneficial for both employees and employers, there are also some drawbacks to it. A potential drawback of using flexible working is that it could create tension within the workforce. Employees may request that they want to work flexibly, but they may get their request denied and therefore become resentful. This could lead to a divide within the workforce or it could demotivate the employees who didn’t get their request granted. Therefore the management team must be very careful on who they give permission to work flexible, to try and make sure that there is no divide or resentment between employees. If some employees do have genuine reasons, than there should be no divide as the other employees will understand why they do not have permission to work flexibly. This is an example why flexible working is a management strategy, as employers have to make sure that no member of staff is greatly affected by who can work flexibly as well as keeping the workforce happy.

Another drawback is the lack of regular communication between an employee and the business. This may become an issue if the employee is not in contact with the office enough, as they are not in enough days or busy at home doing something. This could lead to miscommunication, as there could be an issue of trying to get in contact with them, but if the employee doesn’t respond then it can pose as a threat to projects when everyone is trying to meet deadlines.  This is a very big issue that businesses must make sure does not happen, as the world is such a competitive place, businesses must try and stay ahead of everyone else in order to become successful. But again businesses can try and sort this out by managing it correctly, such as drawing up a contract that specifies how many times the manager contacts the employee or the employee contact the office, or their team for updates. Therefore making sure flexible working is managed correctly is essential and that's why it is again a form of management.

Another potential limitation is that some employees feel flexible working can prevent career progression throughout the business (Mihelich, 2013). This was discovered in a survey carried out by Korn and Ferry in 2012. It was the only negative aspects of flexible working after receiving so much praise from employees and employers within the survey. The reason some employees feel like they cannot progress throughout the business is due to the fact that they feel invisible. This is because employees who work out of the office feel like their work goes without credit and therefore cannot progress as they are simply being looked over. This can be avoided by giving employees full recognition of all of their work, which is identified in Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs as something to look for to help satisfy employee needs at work, so that they can become more productive.

**Work Life Balance**

One of best outcomes of flexible working is that it drastically improves employee’s wellbeing, as flexible working helps improve the work life balance of employees. This is because employees feel a sense of control over their work and it gives them the opportunity to do their work when they want. This is also very important as ‘Work related stress already costs Britain 10.4 million working days per year’ which damages the business as they have to cover work that the employee would usually do. In addition to this, a good work life balance also improves the health of employees which is something every business should value and look after.

Even though some people believe otherwise and flexible working can actually make you ill. This is because employees who work flexibly and have a good work life balance also suffer from separating work time and home time, as well as working in poorer conditions. Both of these issues add on to the unnecessary stress of working, which won’t help employees trying to do their work. Whereas working in an office would be a prime place to work, as all the working conditions in the office will be focused on trying to not distract employees whilst trying to make the employees as relaxed as possible, as well, as trying to motivate and inspire them to be productive and do a good job. Whilst having a good work life balance you may end up doing work later in the evenings when you want to relax but find yourself not be able to do so, as you still have some work to do. Therefore you do not really have control over the time you have, as the reason you have been granted flexible working is because you are busy at home and may not be able to come into the office every day. Professor Gail Kinman has stated that performing work related tasks outside of work stress increases and this could include anything from answering phone calls or checking emails. These work related tasks should be saved for the designated time when the employee is working and employers should avoid sending emails or making calls to the employee outside of work hours, unless it is absolutely necessary.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion I believe that flexible working is a new trend in management. This is due to the fact that it matches up with the criteria that I set it, which where the definitions from the Oxford Dictionary. I managed to provide evidence that flexible working is new, due to the fact it got introduced to businesses recently with a positive correlation to advances within technology. It became easier for businesses to implement and use as an opportunity to become more competitive and attract the best employees. Flexible working is also a trend, as a trend is something that stays around while a fad comes and goes quite quickly. Even though flexible working has been around for a bit, it is still relatively new and it becomes more popular year after year. This can be seen by comparing the third and fourth (the two latest surveys), as only 90% of businesses had at least one type flexible working, but in the six years inbetween the surveys this increased to 97% which shows that flexible working is still on the up, which indicates that this trend is still carrying on. Flexible working is also a management strategy, as the management that implements flexible working also need to make sure that they only let the employees who really need flexible working get it and personally I believe how employer’s mange this concept is extremely important. If can affect another person’s mental health, which should not be taken lightly, by dealing with different employees on who get flexible working and who doesn’t you must make sure as an employer you do not negatively affect someone’s mental state. In addition to this the management team will also need to make sure that everyone is happy and that there are no conflicts between employees. Even though there are some disadvantages to flexible working, such as a lack of recognition, but if the business recruits and hires the right employees who stay professional when they are both in and out of the office, then this should decrease the amount of issues that arise. Therefore I do believe that flexible working is a new trend in management, as well as believing that it will still be used in businesses for years and it will carrying on evolving and always be a part of business. Flexible working heavily depends on technology and in this day and age, technological advances will keep on happening making flexible working even easier and more accessible to do so.

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